

The Blank Page

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“The pages are still blank, but there is a miraculous feeling of the words being there, written in invisible ink and clamoring to become visible.”

-Vladimir Nabakov

The blank page. In its monotonous infamy, it sits before all writers, aspirer and professional alike, idealist and storyteller. Whether one uses a typewriter, a computer, or scrawls manually by pen, his first obstacle is to overcome the forty-foot wall that is the empty page.

It's hard for a writer, at any level of finesse, to imagine writing of merit on the stark paper before he begins. Not that he isn't familiar with the appearance of his own handwriting, or the generic spacing and sizing of the most heavily used fonts on his computer, but rather it's that every writer is a perfectionist from the start.

But that's only reasonable, when it's considered. How to complete a given amount of writing in a relatively short time? Simple, write only one draft. Imagine the hours and hours a writer could salvage by merely cutting out revising, editing, and rewriting from his daily schedule. Needless to say, it's appealing. Before the time of computers, rewriting had to be done from beginning to end. A document couldn't be copied and edited to add, remove, and modify phrases while still leaving a clean, professional-looking document as it can today. The writing process has become much faster, with thanks and regards to the computer. Whether an effect of our human condition, or of the decreasing attention spans and patience the modern age has seemed to develop in us,

we as writers continue to expect instant results from our writing; we want it to be a shorter process still. Perhaps computers aren't so much to thank. Those blazing fast internet search engines and broadband connections don't do much to temper patience. If one frustrates because his home page requires ten seconds to load, how can he maintain focus long enough to work through the weeks of writing, revising, and rewriting that result in quality literature? One can only hope this view of modern society is exaggerated, as there is no more pathetic example of a fulfilling life than one plagued by impatience and a broadband attention span.

Is it difficult to sit down, in front of a clean sheet, and fluently lay down a perfect piece of writing? Yes, in fact it's impossible, and attempts at such are where the potential of the written word declines. Yet we all try this, sometimes more than once, in hopes that the emptiness of the blank page can be filled once, then branded as finished. We shudder to consider the stages between the white page and the final copy because such intermediates perspire the more erratic of our writing.

It's no surprise that the blank page intimidates us. Writing is the sharing of ideas, opinions, and facts through words and phrases, though our perfection complex reduces it to a mere display of fancy literary craftsmanship. The paradox resides in the fact that, while attempting to achieve literary perfection, we in fact dilute our ideas, leaving our work hollow and riddled with airy compound words that fail to express what we originally meant to say. A blank page should be filled, in as continuous a manner as possible, with raw ideas, no matter how roughly they come tumbling out of one's mind. A writer must leave outlines, word choice, and fluency absent in his mind during the first draft; he need first get the ideas down, then follow up with a bit of literary smoothing

and polish. Artists must sketch contours before blending colors; writers must start with the mediocre draft.

In truth, the blank page should be far from intimidating. It encourages the writer to present his ideas in a more permanent way, and to a larger audience. It liberates the creative spirit by allowing anything conceivable to be expressed with elaborate language and fitting tone. The blank page may be a forty-foot wall, but this should only promote it to be the writer's favorite part of his work, and never discouraging. Choosing which ladder will take you to the top of that great wall, and what you will do when you reach it, are reason enough to write.